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ABSTRACT

Rapid changes in science, technology, economics, and politics present great opportunities and even larger responsibilities to leaders in higher education. The concepts of universality, diversity, and interdependence are components of the mission of American universities. Many American universities are universal in two senses, in that they offer an all-encompassing range of subjects and disciplines, and serve a broad spectrum of people and society generally. The concept of diversity also has multiple meanings in the United States--it stands for the many avenues of entry to educational programs and also refers to the ethnic, racial, religious, and language diversity which characterizes American society. Michigan State University has launched a plan for achieving a new level of diversity and excellence, with 50 initiatives addressing quality of academic life, status, and opportunity for minorities, the handicapped, and women. In an era when so many critically important issues can only be dealt with on an international basis, the reality of interdependence can no longer be denied, especially concerning such issues as the environment, management of human diseases, search for energy alternatives, problems of hunger, and the control of terrorism. The reality of interdependence calls for new forms of cooperation among universities, such as joint research projects, increased networking, and collaboration among scientists. (JDD)

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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES
NINTH GENERAL CONFERENCE

UNIVERSALITY, DIVERSITY, INTERDEPENDENCE:
THE MISSIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
5–11 AUGUST 1990

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FIRST PLENARY SESSION

Monday, 6 August 1990, 14.30 – 18.00

Universality, Diversity, Interdependence:
The Missions of the University

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HE 023 969

Address to: General Conference International Association of Universities, Helsinki, Finland, August, 1990.

The Mission of the University--Addressing Issues of Universality, Diversity and Interdependence.

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Five years have passed--five momentous years--since we last gathered as an association in Los Angeles. Since those meetings in August 1985, both the pace and breadth of change in this world have dramatically increased. When our association was first convened in Nice in 1950, who among its founding members would have predicted the economic and scientific changes of these past few decades? And, who among those of us who were at Los Angeles just five years ago would have even dared to speculate about the world-shaking political events of this past year?

When I point to sweeping changes, I refer not only to recent movements toward open, more democratic societies, but also to new promising avenues in biotechnology, to the revolution in communications technology, to advances in medical science and in food production. When the IAU was established just 40 years ago, there were no mini-computers, no fax machines, no genetic engineering, no men who had walked on the moon. We had not experienced the "green revolution" in grain production in Asia, nor had we tested Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), the relatively simple, now widely used approach to Cholera treatment and cure. And, most striking, the new nations of Africa, and others then under colonial regimes, had not yet emerged as full national participants in world affairs.

At that time, we had not awakened to the environmental consequences of industrial growth and to the pressures on this earth posed by rapid, persistent population growth. We rarely referred to the "global" nature of our society, though the farsighted formation of the IAU itself acknowledged even then that university leaders needed to exchange views and work together toward common understandings. And when we met five years ago in Los Angeles, only a few scientific statesmen were dreaming of International cooperative action to slow global warming and, together, combat other widespread environmental problems. Today, such issues are clearly on the world's agenda.

But of all these changes, perhaps the political events of the past year and the shifts in economic strength over the past decade are most sharply etched in our minds as we meet in Helsinki. The political changes are so fundamental and occurred so recently that

we have not yet grasped their full meaning. The new economic strength in Asia is still taking shape. And now we anticipate a united Germany and a greatly strengthened Economic Community in Europe, the dream of statesmen for many years, to be in place before the IAU is to meet again in 1995.

We live in a world of rapid change--in science and technology in economics and politics. As we move toward a new century, the pace will not diminish, it is more likely to increase. And that presents to all of us, all who are leaders in higher education, great opportunities and even larger responsibilities.

All of these shifts and changes relate closely to our universities to your university. For universities have produced all of the high level talent, and in some countries such as my own, much of the basic research which has undergirded scientific and technological progress in the recent past and certainly will continue to do so in the future. Furthermore, it is apparent that university people--our graduates, our students, and our university faculties--are at the forefront of the new openness, the democratic trends which exist broadly in the world.

It is in this new spirit of change, of promise, of openness, that we convene in Helsinki. We are presented with a truly unprecedented opportunity to exchange views and consider openly the issues presented by the theme of this General Conference: "Universality, Diversity, Interdependence: The Missions of the University".

Each of these concepts--universality, diversity, interdependence--is currently important in American higher education and has meaning in our universities. We are trying to deal with them in our way as I am confident each of you is trying in your own way. As components of the university mission, they are worthy of our sustained attention. Therefore, I shall now consider each, singling out aspects which are most on our agenda in the United States and, as suggested to me by the conference organizers, drawing examples from my own university's experience, and that of others in my country.

Universality has two meanings when viewed from an American perspective. First, it suggests including a range of functions and, particularly, subjects and disciplines which are broadly all-encompassing. Secondly, it means opening higher education to serve a broad spectrum of our people and society generally. Our U.S. universities encompass a wide array of functions and subjects--the humanities, natural and social sciences, engineering, agriculture, professional fields. Many are universal in this first sense. And also, universal in the second sense, for our educational systems from one coast to the other, have incorporated the concept of making higher education, that is education beyond secondary schools, widely if not universally accessible to all who qualify

and benefit from it.

We are a nation of mega-universities, universities which are very large by most world standards, broadly inclusive of basic disciplines and professional curricula, granting both undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. Many include teaching and research and extending knowledge through classes and other means to urban and rural adult learners, even those at some distance from our home campuses. My own university is such a mega-university and there are many others.

Many of you know that we have no national system of higher education in the U.S. In fact, many of our institutions are not connected to any level of government--either federal or state. They are private in funding and governance and quite independent. But many of them reflect the "mega-versity" traits I have mentioned, as do numerous major state or public universities. My own Michigan State University has more than 200 programs of undergraduate and post-graduate studies. We offer advanced degrees up to the doctorate in over 80 fields of study. These programs serve 43,000 students of diverse backgrounds and from all corners of Michigan, all states of our nation and well over 100 foreign countries. We have 14 colleges and major comparable units, all of them with substantial research programs financed by the university itself, the State of Michigan, private organizations or corporations, U.S. government agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or the Department of Energy.

In about half of our 50 states, there are statewide systems of higher education which plan, coordinate and take some measure of responsibility for higher educational achievement and accessibility. There is no single pattern followed by such systems. But higher education, even in a large state such as mine, with over 9.5 million people, can also be managed without a state system. Our state has 15 state supported institutions of varying size, mission, location, and quality. And, we also have 29 community or two-year colleges which offer vocational or professional programs and academic courses which, in some cases, enable a good student to transfer into a full university four year program. There are 1400 junior colleges in the U.S. and they, plus some of our smaller or urban universities bring "universality" of higher educational opportunity to our people generally.

As the president of the oldest "land-grant" university in the U.S., I would be remiss if I did not refer to that innovative, even revolutionary, concept of higher education. It represented at its inception in 1862 our populist nation's profound contribution to universality in higher education. The land-grant institution in the U.S. was a sharp turn away from educating only the elite in our society and covering a narrow range of subjects. It provided both legitimacy and quality to the study of agriculture and other

technical subjects which were so important to the sons and daughters of a far flung, diverse, still essentially rural nation. The land-grant colleges and universities offered higher education to meet the needs of the many. And as the nation grew and changed, such universities evolved and helped to make advanced education available in remote locations and to new waves of immigrants. Today, the basic tenets of the land-grant philosophy have been widely accepted among our universities. And the philosophy and model has been studied and adapted in other nations. We still work at the task of adapting land-grant university values and philosophy to serve present societal needs, particularly in our urban areas.

We believe that quality higher education should be accessible to all who can benefit and who can qualify. And, over the years, we have taken many steps to realize that goal. But in recent years we, in U.S. higher education, have become painfully aware that minorities in our society have been left behind, are not continuing into advanced education, too often because of financial difficulty, but also for other complicated reasons. This is a vexing, difficult challenge to our quest for universality.

We are struggling to keep down the cost of public higher education. At my own University, I can honestly say to the young people of our State that none who meet academic standards need stay away from the university for financial reasons. We find a way to help them--through a large student aid program, including grants, loans or work opportunities. It is a part of our mission to be accessible, to see that no Michigan student from whatever background need lose the opportunity to reach his/her full potential through education, including a university education if standards are met.

Turning to diversity, here too the concept has several meanings in the U.S. It stands for the many avenues of entry to degree programs and services offered by our higher education system. Diversity can be seen in our community colleges, and in the many types and shapes of our universities. It exists in our varied study and degree options. I just described these conditions, so will not detail them here; but the second meaning of diversity has much greater importance to us at this time in the U.S. I refer to the ethnic, racial, religious, and even language diversity which characterizes our American society, and to the serious challenges this diversity presents all of our institutions, including universities.

These issues of how best to educate diverse populations presents options and questions at all levels of education in our society, and at all levels they are being taken seriously at all levels. As a society and as universities we are determined to bring into the main stream of productive and professional life segments of our population that have not participated fully in the past--the African-Americans whose ancestors came centuries ago as slaves to

America, other ethnic groups such as those of Latin American ancestry, and, most numerous of all, women. For various historical reasons, they have been held to lower levels of participation in many professional fields. We have resolved to correct the inequalities of opportunity and preparation which exist in our uniquely diverse American society, and we are doing so through special programs, affirmative action, and through laws.

Let there be no mistake, we do not consider the diversity we are now directly confronting to be a weakness. On the contrary, diversity brings elements of great strength for the creativity and richness of our society. It has in the past and will in the future. But, for the immediate future, we must be especially sensitive and attentive to the needs of those Americans who have been educationally disadvantaged.

At Michigan State we have launched "The MSU IDEA--Institutional Diversity: Excellence in Action". It is a comprehensive plan for achieving a new level of diversity and excellence at our university, and it projects a wide range of initiatives--fifty in all--which address the actions needed to elevate quality of academic life, status and opportunity for minorities, the handicapped, and women. Launched last year, it was drawn by our Provost from two years of deliberation and consultation across the university and approved by our Governing Board. It will be implemented over a number of years but we have already taken some steps, made key appointments, and put new procedures in place.

The goals and actions of the MSU IDEA, unique to my university, are reflected in parallel initiatives at many other universities. Our diverse universities are attacking the issues posed by our societal diversity in many different ways, guided by our philosophies and missions, and reinforced by governmental actions.

Though I commented on both universality and diversity from several perspectives, I will pursue only one when considering the third strand: interdependence. This concept has only one meaning among American universities--its international meaning. American higher educational leadership has come to accept global interdependence in the past five years. In my view that is none too soon. As a nation, we have come slowly to the concept, shielded by our own size and insularity. But, in an era when so many critically important issues can only be dealt with on an international basis, we can no longer deny the reality of interdependence. I refer to issues such as those posed by the environment, the management of human diseases, the search for energy alternatives, problems of hunger, the control of terrorism. And to issues tied to scientific and technological progress, and, indeed, to national prosperity itself, given the growing importance of world trade and finance. All of these require a global perspective if we are to deal with them intelligently.

When daily exchange rates and stock market trends and averages from Japan and Europe are quoted to us in America by television at breakfast time, when much of what we consume in our daily lives obviously comes from abroad, when discussions of global warming are in our newspapers,. we can witness each day the importance of a global perspective. We are truly interdependent and many of our universities are striving to reflect that fact in special activities and new educational programs.

That is not to say we have ignored the rest of the world in the past--we have not. Some of our universities are already very international. At my own institution for years we have had an active program of education abroad for our U.S. students; a leading program of international technical assistance and development research; exchange ties and linkages with institutions in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa; a large number of international students and scholars present on campus; and area study programs and international units which impact broadly on all of our faculty and students. We have helped to form a successful consortium of universities to carry on programs of international cooperation--the Midwest Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA). In many of these pursuits, we would be typical of other U.S. Universities that have been represented at IAU General Conferences over the years. But many others who are not here are much less involved; and we, too, have much more to do to bring the essential messages of interdependence to all of our students.

And we, too, have changed over the years. In our initial work in developing countries, helping others was our only theme. It is still a strong goal and consideration; but it is balanced now by a determination to learn from our colleagues abroad and to bring lessons and experiences into our own classroom. We seek linkages and mutually beneficial long-term ties in our relations abroad. And this reflects a grasp of the true meaning of interdependence. The IAU can be a major force in this important movement.

The reality of interdependence calls for new forms of cooperation among universities. It calls for rules permitting--indeed encouraging--exchanges of faculty and students among us. It calls for joint research projects, collaboration among scientists, thinking together about common higher educational issues in addition to "Mission". It calls for increased networking, made easier by new technology. This Association has the potential of helping us to meet some of these needs and I, for one, encourage it to increase the pace of responding to these dictates of interdependence.

Universality, Diversity, Interdependence--three worthy and interwoven strands of university mission forming the theme of our deliberations at this Ninth General Conference. Each is worthy of our serious attention together, and we each bring our institutional experience to enlighten our exchange of views. Let us be sure to

take this unusual opportunity, on this occasion in Helsinki, to explore thoroughly and openly these concepts and their role in our respective university missions.

I wish to conclude my remarks as I began. We have witnessed in the five years since our last General Conference truly momentous changes in the World. We are presented now with the unprecedented opportunity to meet in a spirit of openness and candor. Our Association has brought us together at the right moment. As leaders of the major universities of the World--institutions which present creative ideas, the most disciplined minds and well considered values to our respective communities--what can we do which will continue to encourage the positive changes and new avenues opening for mankind? How can the missions of our universities be brought to reflect a new dedication to our respective societal needs in this changing world? And how can our Association help us to serve our institutional missions more effectively in these new times?

Our focus here is particularly appropriate at a time of great change in the World. A statement of "Mission" shapes institutional programs and defines purpose. We are all aware of the variations in university mission from one society to another. Some universities are essentially trainers of high level manpower; others also incorporate the search for new knowledge; still others perform service to society more broadly. Some are designed to serve only the elite; some seek to meet educational needs of a broader population and are integral to the national development process. It is time of change, it behooves all of us to re-examine the very meaning and purpose of the "university"; and as leaders of these precious institutions, to consider how our basic purposes, our "missions", might evolve to meet the needs of our people even better in the years ahead.

When we leave here on Saturday, let us all feel that we have explored such questions thoroughly and have established a fresh and open exchange on these and other matters, an exchange to be expanded in the years ahead. Let us make openness and candor on such important issues, the hallmark of this Ninth General Conference.